

# Communism, Socialism, Capitalism, and the Church

(Acts 2:44-45)

Yearly Theme: “Joy is...”

Series Title: “Church & Culture”

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## Something to think about:

In the 21st century, we find ourselves (the Church included), wrestling with schools of political and social thought that are starkly dividing us into polarized camps of good vs. evil. But who is right and who is wrong? Who really is good and who really is evil? Let’s look at the predominant systems that are dividing society today; systems that are even beginning to divide the church:

**Communism:** “advocacy of a classless society in which private ownership has been abolished and the means of production and subsistence belong to the community.”<sup>1</sup>

**Socialism:** “an economic theory or system in which the means of production, distribution, and exchange are owned by the community collectively, usually through the state. It is characterized by production for use rather than profit, by equality of individual wealth, by the absence of competitive economic activity, and usually, by government determination of investment, prices, and production levels.”<sup>2</sup>

**Capitalism:** “... an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, characterized by the freedom of capitalists to operate or manage their property for profit in competitive conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, these aren’t the only systems of thought or socio-political systems that exist, but they are the three dominant systems that are at the forefront of discussion within the American culture today. With these three systems defined, where does the church fit? Does it fit within one of these three structures/systems, or does it fit somewhere else?

Let’s start by taking a look at our key passage of Scripture today...

**Acts 2:42-47 (NLT),**

<sup>42</sup> All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.

<sup>43</sup> A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>44</sup> And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

<sup>45</sup> They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. <sup>46</sup> They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— <sup>47</sup> all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

After reading this passage, and after having some time to dialogue a bit about the structures and systems of the world, what structure/system is actually Biblical? In order to have a clear answer, we have to understand what the Church really is and why Jesus established it. What was Jesus’ ideal structure and system for His Church?

**Church (Ekklesia):** “an Ekklesia or, assembly, of persons known as the “Body of Christ,” with Christ as its head, originator, and sustainer through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Everything in the

world that does exist came into existence through Christ, for Christ, and is held together by Christ.<sup>4</sup> The Church is comprised of different social classes, genders, ethnicities and races that stand in equality together connected by faith in Christ in obedience to His commands and teachings.<sup>5</sup> The Church’s mandate is to love God and to love others (even their enemies), and to make disciples of Christ out of that love for Him and others;<sup>6</sup> in so doing the Kingdom of God is manifested in the world as a light to the world.

Though verses 44-45 may sound similar to the characteristics of some of the modern-day governmental structures, there is something starkly different in the early church. And here’s the key point this morning:

**Key Point: “God’s model of government for the church is known as the ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’”**

But how does the Kingdom of God work? What does it look like, and how is it different from the kingdoms and structures of the world? In order to understand the differences more fully there are a couple of questions that we need to ask:

### 1. What is the focus of the kingdoms of the world contrasted with God’s Kingdom?

The focus shifts from the people making the decisions to God making the decisions. Jesus is the “Head” of the Church, and as such He must be followed and obeyed rather than the other way around.

### 2. How has the American Church adopted the model/s of the world in place of God’s model?

In our attempts to be relevant to the world, the church has adopted the structures of the world. We run the church like a social justice agency at times trying to right every wrong in society and make everything fair and equal, or we try and run the church like a democracy where everyone has a say (oftentimes to the neglect of God or His Word). However, these things seem to be secondary, or even absent at times in the Old and New Testaments.

### 3. What is the solution to the problem within the American Church?

The best structure/system to govern the Church is God’s rule. This structure is found in Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). A great place to start is Matthew’s Gospel in chapters 5, 6, and 7 (commonly called the “Sermon on the Mount”). The American Church needs to learn to follow Christ’s lead again. We need to begin to ask Him what He wants rather than asking Him to bless what we’re doing.

## Something to take home:

So, what system or structure is the right system or structure for the Church? Communism? Socialism? Capitalism? Monarchy? Tetrarchy? Oligarchy? Tyranny? Autocracy? Anarchy?

God’s Kingdom is a *Theocracy* built upon love (agape) through the salvation of Jesus Christ and the manifest presence of the power of the Holy Spirit. The complete unity and love found in the Godhead (the Trinity) is the model for the Church.<sup>7</sup> Compared to the kingdoms of the world and its systems, structures, and philosophies, God’s Kingdom and way of salvation seems foolish. However, it’s God’s Kingdom that will last forever, and it’s God’s wisdom that makes the world’s wisdom look foolish.<sup>8</sup>

**Key Point: “God’s model of government for the church is known as the ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’”**

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<sup>1</sup> Collins English Dictionary—Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition, © William Co 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Corinthians 12.

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 3:26-28.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 22:37-40; Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>7</sup> John 17.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.